

Communicating for awareness change

Dan Snyder, Stephenie Fu*, Paul Vosloo and Victoria Goldstein

*Porter Novelli International, 1909 K Street NW, 4th Floor,
Washington, DC 20006, USA*

Media environments may vary from country to country, but the many similarities in communications principles can contribute to effective communications for awareness change. This chapter examines five fundamental action steps in communications and media relations that have equal relevance for creating successful programmes in countries around the world.

Select the media

Deciding which media to target may sound like a simple task, but it actually can be quite complex, as several considerations contribute to the final selection. Perhaps the first and most important decision is choosing between unpaid media (known as 'public relations' in the USA or 'propaganda' in Latin America) or paid media (i.e. advertising), or utilizing an integrated campaign which uses a combination of the two. While using an integrated approach that may include a combination of strategies such as public relations, paid advertising, direct mail and the internet may be ideal, often a programme's limited resources preclude taking this approach. For many programmes, it becomes important to maximize the impact of limited funding by utilizing an approach that best suits its needs and objectives.

Unpaid media, or public relations, can yield effective results at a relatively low cost. Examples of unpaid media include editorials, newspaper articles and television news stories. Unpaid media often maintain more credibility because the message reaches the consumer within a news context¹. What is gained in credibility, however, may be lost in control over the message and its placement. Materials sent to the media

* Corresponding author: Email sfu@porternovelli.com

may or may not be used, or even read. Therefore, there is often a high opportunity cost involved in utilizing this approach alone.

Paid media, or advertising, provides the opportunity for *guaranteed* repetition, placement and timing, as well as control of an unfiltered message. You decide what the advertisement will say, what it will look like, and where and when it will run. Paid media, however, costs far more than unpaid media and often does not convey the same credibility as public relations. Additionally, advertising offers less space or time to convey lengthy, complex information.

There is a type of unpaid advertising used around the world that maintains high credibility and offers control of the message. These public service announcements (PSAs) are provided to media outlets to use for free as space becomes available (e.g. when a paying advertiser drops out at the last minute or advertising space remains unsold). While PSAs offer increased control over content, they are not without their drawbacks. Creating PSAs costs as much as creating paid advertisements, and one retains no control over when or how frequently the announcement runs. Moreover, competition for free space – in print or broadcast alike – is fierce. Media gatekeepers – production managers at magazines, community affairs directors at television and radio stations – sift through large numbers of PSAs when deciding which to run².

Much of the success realized by the US 5 A Day for Better Health Program with the placements of its PSAs can be attributed to the PSAs' positive tact, humourous and lively tone and their colourful appearance. Print PSAs, for example, have utilized colourful, energetic and whimsical line drawings that quickly communicate the positive 5 A Day message and convey the fun aspect of the campaign. The appealing design, coupled with the scientific credibility of the US National Cancer Institute (NCI) tag-line, has been responsible for securing placements not only in major national consumer magazines and radio stations, but on airport kiosks and mass transit posters as well. The Produce for Better Health Foundation experienced similar success in placing its 5 A Day television PSA on national networks when it produced a spot featuring an energetic, fun-loving 'Produce Man' character.

Identify and understand your target audience

Communications for awareness and behaviour change requires a clear understanding of the campaign's target audience, that segment of the general population you are most interested in reaching and whose behaviour you most want to influence. It is essential that programme planners both identify their target and then develop all their communication strategies with that target audience's perspective in mind³.

In our experience, the following questions outline the key points to be considered in selecting a target audience:

- *Timeframe.* How many people can be reached over the designated period of time?
- *Resources.* What is the budget, and how can it be used to its best advantage?
- *Urgency.* Is there a segment of the population that is in great and immediate need of the information?

- *State of readiness.* Where is the target audience in terms of their current behaviour as it relates to the desired behaviour?

Defining and understanding how to reach a target audience requires a thorough analysis of the group's demographics including their age, ethnicity, income and education. While these are key characteristics, a careful analysis of 'psychographics', or lifestyle measures, is critical to effectively reaching your audience. These psychographics bring the target to life. Answers to questions concerning their health-related attitudes, perceived benefits and barriers to achieving the desired behaviour, and their credible sources of health information allow for a comprehensive view of the target audience. A firm grasp of the target's psychographics enables planners to understand barriers and motivators essential in shaping effective messages resulting in the desired behaviour change.

The origins of the US 5 A Day Program present one model of how qualitative research shapes communication strategy. Given that about 140 million Americans were eating fewer than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day before the programme was launched nationally in 1991, the universe of people who needed to be reached with the 5 A Day message was large. In order to maximize the impact of a limited (\$1 million) communications budget, a core target audience was selected.

The target audience was identified as adults trying to eat more fruits and vegetables, but who still fell well short of eating five or more servings a day. NCI communications research indicated that approximately 50% of the American adult population fell within this target group⁴. The psychographic profile of the audience determined that most understood the diet–cancer link and agreed with it. The research also shed light on characteristics of the target group and how they approached their lives: they felt very rushed and stressed, and perceived time, cost and convenience to be critical factors that influenced their ability to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption.

Given these characteristics, the 5 A Day communications strategy originally was designed to teach the target group how to add two or more fruits and vegetables a day 'the easy way'. By positioning the action of adding servings as 'easy', the target audience would find making this behaviour change less of an effort and more attainable. Messages directed at the target audience, therefore, were designed to reinforce their positive self-perceptions and to show them how to fit 5 A Day into their lives. Qualitative research further identified actions consumers would find 'easy' to increase their fruit and vegetable consumption. In an effort to reinforce the strategy, all 5 A Day communications materials included one or more of the sample actions to help make it easy for people to eat five servings a day.

Qualitative research is key in identifying the target audience's media habits, and yielding important insights into how best to reach them with behaviour change messages. Annual national surveys provide the NCI with clear information about which sources its target audience trusts most for health information and details on what types of media they use most (e.g. local television shows versus national morning shows, special interest magazines). These data have provided direction for

efficiently targeting specific media, such as knowing which radio station formats to target with health news inserts that contain information and consumer tips on eating 5 A Day.

Understanding consumer media habits is essential in developing and refining strategies that maximize the impact of limited resources. Media habits vary considerably between countries as well as within population segments. In Mexico, a country with a population of 95 million people, 25 million of who are in Mexico City alone, the largest newspaper has a circulation of only 200 000. Magazines are also not widely read: a magazine circulation of 10 000 would be considered large. Consequently, targeted communications programmes rely heavily on broadcast rather than print media because broadcasts, especially radio, reach larger numbers of people. In Japan, a different scenario exists. In this country of 120 million, print media are the primary information sources for consumers. The largest newspaper in Japan has a morning circulation of 10 million and an evening circulation of 5 million – 15 million readers are reached each day. Additionally, the Japanese read approximately 36 magazines per year each. This can provide a tremendous opportunity for targeted communications, as print journalists are often anxious to fill the vast amount of space available.

Create appropriate messages

Programme messages cannot simply tell people what they should do. Messages to the target audience must be *motivational*. The characteristics of a programme's message may range from rational to emotional, educational to persuasive⁵. Whatever the characteristics may be, the messages must give people a compelling reason to make the change. The messages must also reflect the *benefits* to the target group, and articulate *actionable* items that are *appropriate* for them. As noted above, several messages used in the US 5 A Day Program were developed to address the target audience's self-identified characteristics of feeling overwhelmed and stressed. These messages therefore reinforce how easy it is to eat five or more pieces of fruit or vegetables with sample action steps, such as adding a 6 oz glass of 100% juice in the morning, and eating a salad with lunch. Such concrete and targeted messages enable the target audience to adopt positive behaviour changes gradually and within the context of their lifestyle⁶.

It is essential that in the case of public relations efforts, the messages developed for the target group must also resonate with the media as the media serves as the gatekeeper to the target audience. If the message, or the vehicle carrying the message, does not gain the media's attention and interest first, it will never reach the intended audience. For example, the US 5 A Day media campaign by the NCI ensured that the pilots of a new, innovative series of television news inserts, 'Do Yourself a Flavor' with well-known cook Graham Kerr, resonated with television station news directors before moving ahead with the full initiative. Because it offered television stations a known and valued personality, messages relevant to their viewers and the unique, energetic content of creative, easy fruit and vegetable tips and recipes, the product: 'Do Yourself a Flavor' is now used by television stations as a weekly part of their local news programming.

Know the media

Get to know local, regional and national media – know their needs, likes and dislikes. It is important to approach each media outlet with information that is useful and appropriate to that specific outlet. For media targeting purposes it is especially important to understand:

1. *Hard versus soft news.* Hard news is timely, but by virtue of its importance in the news cycle, provides less control over the story. Soft news is more feature-orientated, with more flexible deadlines. Examples of hard news include new research findings and food safety crises; soft news includes seasonal stories and consumer tips. The US national 5 A Day media campaign uses both approaches. For example, the embargoed release of new US fruit and vegetable consumption data is developed to serve as hard news while seasonal feature news releases including tip sheets and recipes are available for use in feature stories during the summer and winter holidays.
2. *Sections of newspapers and magazines.* While it is important that your materials target the appropriate group, it is equally important for your media campaign to know which section of the newspaper or magazine to target. Hard news generally is found on the front page of the newspaper, while soft news is covered in feature pages or sections of newspapers. Familiarizing yourself with 'beat' reporters (e.g. health or food), as well as newspaper and magazine columns that are good venues for your story, can be effective ways for your message to be heard.
3. *Programmes on television and radio.* Develop an understanding of which radio and/or television programmes or programme segments to target, as you would for the print media. Determine, for example, whether the story is more likely to be used as a news story or possibly as a topic for discussion during a public affairs programme. Knowing who the producer of the show is and understanding the roles of producers, news directors, reporters and other key contacts in broadcast can be essential in ensuring that your story receives the placement you desire.
4. *Deadlines.* Deadlines vary from medium to medium, section to section, and programme to programme. Being sensitive to deadlines is critical in developing relationships with the media. Know when to call or not call the media contact, and how quickly to respond to the contact with answers; have a spokesperson ready to interview, as needed.
5. *Individual editors and reporters who cover your issue.* Establish rapport with key media contacts. These contacts will help position the staff as important resources for timely information, ideas, data and spokespeople who support the programme.

The other aspect that is critical to successful media relations is understanding the nature of information exchange. There are two ways to look at information flow from the organization to the target audience. The first is the media process in a traditional sense (Fig. 1) and the second process reflects changes with the ever-increasing dominance of the internet (Fig. 2). Increasingly, we are working in a global environment. Fuelled by the internet, messages travel around the world in seconds. While access to the internet is quite expensive in some countries and, therefore, not considered a leading method of communication in regions such as Latin America, journalists'

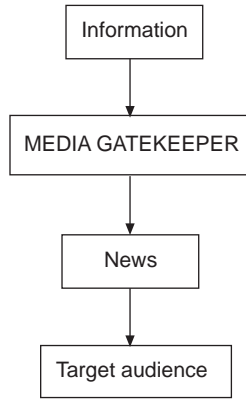


Fig. 1 Traditional print and broadcast media process

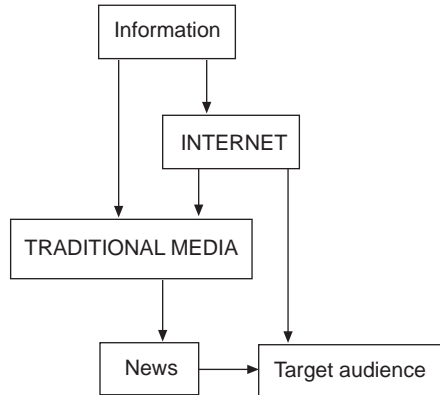


Fig. 2 Media process including the internet

access to and reliance on the internet continues to increase, even in countries where the general population does not have internet access. Because news stories which originate from the USA can instantaneously filter into Europe, Asia and Latin America, and vice versa, the accuracy of such messages is paramount. While the implementation of these messages may differ from country to country, the messages themselves should remain consistent.

In addition to the importance of message consistency to consumers, the growing use of the internet by the media for research necessitates a thorough understanding of how the internet works and the speed with which information – accurate or inaccurate – can travel. Media gatekeepers, like consumers, select information from the internet, interpret it, then package it to reach the public through their own channels. Ignoring the media’s use of this channel only limits one’s influence in shaping the messages the target audiences receive.

Offering new information on a web site can also serve as a news generator in and of itself. For example, in 1998, the US 5 A Day media campaign created an interactive web site, which was widely publicised and garnered high visibility through unpaid new media and print media coverage. Including the programme's interactive web site address in national newspaper and magazine articles generated millions of media impressions, and directed consumers to the site itself. The mention of the web site address in *Parade*, a national magazine, caused more than 75 000 daily hits on the site.

Whether one works with traditional media outlets, new media (i.e. gatekeepers to internet web sites) or both, understanding the global media environment is increasingly important. Media from country to country feed off each other. A major news story from the *New York Times* could spark another story to be written in the *Wall Street Journal* in Europe, which could also appear on the web site of another media outlet, which reaches still more consumers worldwide. One television media source also could feed the identical story to other countries in its entirety, even in its original format. For example, there are about 100 media outlets based in Miami, Florida, that serve the Hispanic market in the USA and feed media throughout Latin America. A story on CNN in Spanish would yield approximately 72 million impressions in the USA and Latin America combined.

Connect

Connect the programme's news with the media.

1. *Make news.* Find a creative news peg to hook the media's interest. Create an event or commission a survey. For example, the US 5 A Day Program created news with a news conference that released results of a baseline survey that showed low US consumer awareness of the 5 A Day message and few Americans eating the recommended minimum of five daily servings of fruits and vegetables. Results were instantaneous as national television news programmes, CNN, The *New York Times* and others picked up the story.
2. *Ride news.* Leverage an existing news event and become part of the news story. For example, a study on the benefits of folic acid can provide a platform to reinforce the benefits of vegetables as good sources of folic acid and keep your programme's message in the public's eye.
3. *Be a reliable source.* Establish a solid working relationship with reporters. Make them aware that your organization's staff are a valuable source of information available to help them create a credible, insightful story. Always be responsive and accommodating to them when they call.
4. *Be a player.* To be a reliable source to the media and other organizations, be visible. Participate in professional associations and their meetings, network with colleagues who have similar or complementary interests, author articles, lecture, attend hearings and write letters to the editors of newspapers. Get involved.

References

- 1 Wilcox D, Ault P, Agee W. What is public relations? In: Wilcox D, Ault P, Agee W, eds. *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*. New York: Longman, 1998; 15.
- 2 Atkin C, Arkin E. Issues and initiatives in communicating health information. In: Atkin C, Wallack L, eds. *Mass Communication and Public Health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990; 15.
- 3 Andreasen, A. Understanding how customer behavior changes. In: Andreasen A, ed. *Marketing Social Change: Changing Behavior to Promote Health, Social Development, and the Environment*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995; 147–8.
- 4 Lefebvre RC, Doner L, Johnston C, Loughrey K, Balch GI, Sutton SM. Use of database marketing and consumer-based health communications in message design: an example from the Office of Cancer Communications' '5 A Day for Better Health' Program. In: Maibach E, Parrott RL, eds. *Designing Health Messages: Approaches From Communication Theory and Public Health Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995; 217–46.
- 5 McGuire WJ. Attitudes and attitude change. In: Lindzey G, Aronson E, eds. *Handbook of Social Psychology*, Vol. 2, 3rd edn. New York: Random House, 1985; 233–346.
- 6 Cartwright, D. Some principles of mass persuasion: selected findings of research on the sale of United States war bonds. *Human Relations* 1949; 2; 253–67.